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United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Ambassador Arsim Zekolli, Head of the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Carol Fuller
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
September 3, 2009

Madam Chairwoman,

The United States joins other delegations in welcoming you, Ambassador Zekolli, and thanking you for your thorough and detailed report. We congratulate the Center on the celebration of its 10-year anniversary, and appreciate the integral role that it plays in supporting the Government of Turkmenistan in its efforts to adhere to its OSCE commitments.

The United States believes that the top OSCE priority in Turkmenistan should be Human Dimension activities. We are therefore pleased that the host government is ready to engage with the Center in the implementation of human dimension initiatives, particularly in the two new areas you pointed out of prisoner rights and steps against human trafficking. We were pleased to see recent reforms in Turkmenistan's legal system, especially in the areas of judicial impartiality and the criminal procedures code. We note, in particular, the Center's provision of training to more than 200 judges, prosecutors, investigators and defense attorneys in new ways to look at issues surrounding the pre-trial detention of criminal defendants. Implementation of these laws is critical to bring about real reform. We will watch closely how the Government of Turkmenistan implements these new laws to bring about real reform.

Similarly, we encourage your continued efforts to foster the development of Turkmen civil society. We note the Center's vital role in bringing together NGO and government leaders, despite the burdensome NGO registration process and ongoing difficulties finding channels to express opposing views. We observe with some concern the continued lack of new political parties registering in Turkmenistan, even after constitutional changes that now allow them to do so. We hope to see progress on these issues as civil society develops and as the climate for other political parties to operate takes hold. We encourage you to continue following closely developments in this area.

We note with satisfaction the Center's important efforts to prevent trafficking in persons and domestic violence this past year and we commend you and your staff for the excellent conference that took place on trafficking last week. We also commend the government of Turkmenistan for its commitment to supporting the conference and dealing openly with this serious problem.

We wholeheartedly endorse the Center's strong focus on border security issues as a means of combating terrorism and preventing trafficking in drugs and persons – an area where the OSCE can make a clear difference. This focus has produced real results in the first dimension, particularly in the vital area of border security. We congratulate your team, Mr. Ambassador, for the joint training with Turkmen and Afghan border guards and hope that still greater cooperation along this crucial border will remain a focus of the Center. We commend the government of Turkmenistan for supporting two extra-budgetary border projects and OSCE efforts to stop the flow of drugs and other contraband from Afghanistan

into Central Asia. The support has made a difference in the security and stability of the region.

In the second dimension, the Center is on target with its efforts to help develop a market economy in Turkmenistan by concentrating efforts to join in the President's call to fight corruption and money laundering. Working to strengthen the regulatory framework for small and medium-sized enterprises is foresighted. Similarly, the Center's programming on effective water use will pay dividends for future generations of Turkmen.

The United States fully supports the vital role that the OSCE Center in Ashgabat plays in helping the Government of Turkmenistan to fulfill its OSCE commitments.

Thank you very much for joining us today, Ambassador Zekolli.

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.